DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 063 CS 505 440

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TITLE Argumentativeness in Interpersonal Communication Contexts.
PUB DATE 1 May 86
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (77th, Atlantic City, NJ, April 30-May 3, 1986).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aggression; Collective Bargaining; *Communication Research; Decision Making; *Interpersonal Communication; Leadership; Marriage; *Motivation; *Organizational Communication; *Sex
IDENTIFIERS *Argumentativeness

ABSTRACT

Recent communication research on argumentativeness has taken the following six directions: (1) investigating factors associated with individuals who differ or vary in the motivational tendency of their argumentativeness; (2) examining the influence of gender on argumentativeness; (3) exploring argumentativeness in marriage; (4) examining the influence of argumentativeness in negotiations, leadership, and decision-making; (5) exploring the interaction of the trait and situational components of the argumentativeness mode; and (6) examining argumentativeness in an organizational context. After brief reviews of the first five research directions, areas of study remaining to be addressed are considered. Additional research should explore how beliefs about arguing and how underlying motivational tendencies develop. It should search for other explanations of why some individuals have extremely low motivation to argue and investigate more fully the highly argumentative individual. Finally, it should examine nonverbal behavior and aggressive communication. (SRT)

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ARGUMENTATIVENESS IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION CONTEXTS

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Paper presented to the Eastern Communication Association annual convention, May 1, 1986, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

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ARGUMENTATIVENESS IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION CONTEXTS

The Importance of Argumentativeness

Since antiquity the communication discipline has been concerned with the study of arguing and argumentative communication. From Aristotle's Rhetoric to contemporary behavioral science and rhetorical studies of argument, the communication discipline has advanced the notion that arguing is a constructive communication activity.

Argumentative communication is a ubiquitous form of human communication commonly found in interpersonal interaction. When social conflict exists, attempts to resolve that conflict may be accomplished through communication which is aggressive in nature. As suggested by Infante (1986), aggressive interpersonal communication can take several forms. These forms range from a relatively dispassionate argument over a controversial issue (e.g., arguing with one's spouse over where to go on a vacation), to physically aggressive and violent behaviors along the lines suggested by Infante (in press, b).

This paper will provide some detail about the importance of one aspect of an individual's personality which controls symbolic aggression - argumentativeness. The paper will review some of the research findings about argumentativeness in interpersonal communication which have emerged during the last five years, will provide suggestions for future research directions and offer some research questions that may stimulate other researchers to

examine regarding this important construct. It is our goal to more fully understand the predisposition of argumentativeness in order that it may be of maximum value to individuals engaged in the productive amelioration or management of social and/or interpersonal conflict.

Argumentativeness is defined as a generally stable trait that predisposes individuals in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions that others take on those issues (Infante & Rancer, 1982). This construct has been distinguished from verbal aggressiveness, where individuals may attack an adversary's <u>self-concept</u> instead of, or in addition to, his or her <u>position</u> on the issue (Infante & Wigley, 1986).

The psychological approach to understanding argumentative communication (Infante & Rancer, 1982) has focused on the general trait to be argumentative, ARG_{gt}, which is conceptualized as the interaction of two motivational tendencies, ARG_{ap}, motivation to approach arguments, and ARG_{av}, motivation to avoid arguments. The more ARG_{ap} exceeds ARG_{av}, the more an individual is argumentative.

The psychological approach to studying arguing has focused on what arguing means to the individual in terms of motivation and perceptions, and how people respond to another person's argumentative trait predisposition and accompanying behaviors (Infante, 1981, 1982, 1985a, 1985b; Rancer & Infante, 1985; Infante & Gorden, 1985a, 1985b; Rancer & Dierks-Stewart, 1985; Rancer, Baukus & Amato, in press; Schultz, 1982; Infante, Wall, Leap & Danielson, 1984; Infante, Trebing, Shepherd & Seeds, 1984;

Rancer, Baukus & Infante, 1985).

In addition to the trait component, the Infante and Rancer (1982) model of argumentativeness also includes situational factors in order to more accurately predict motivation to argue in a given situation. A part of this theory suggests that a person's motivation to argue in a particular situation is determined by the interaction of the person's trait, ARG_{gt}, and their perceptions of the probability and importance of success and failure in the situation.

The tendency to approach a particular argument is viewed as a multiplicative function of the trait motivation for approaching arguments, and the perceived probability of success and the importance of success for the particular argument. The tendency to avoid a particular argument is similarly viewed as a multiplicative function of the trait motivation for avoiding arguments, and the perceived probability of failure and the importance of failure for the given argument. Thus, according to the theory, an individual's motivation for participating in a given argumentative situation is a joint product of both trait and situational influences. A recent study by Infante (in press, a) demonstrated that inclusion of these situational perceptions significantly increases our ability to predict an individual's resultant motivation to argue in a particular situation.

While conflict is inevitably a part of many interactions, communication researchers have tended to pursue more rigorously the non-aggressive forms of communication when exploring the interpersonal communication context. A plethora of research has

been produced examining supportive communication and its accompanying variables (e.g., openness, self-disclosure, trust, empathy, positive regard, etc.). With the establishment of a model and measure of argumentativeness, communication researchers have begun to explore the influence of this predisposition on interpersonal communication.

Previous research has discovered the influence that several communication predispositions have on interpersonal communication behavior. Communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1977), rhetorical sensitivity (Hart, Carlson & Eadie, 1980), innovativeness (Hurt, Joseph & Cook, 1977), communicator style (Norton, 1983) and androgyny (Wheeless & Dierks-Stewart; Rancer & Dierks-Rancer, 1985) have been investigated with regard to influencing relational communication outcomes.

Recent research on argumentativeness has also explored the influence this construct has on marital satisfaction (Rancer, Baukus & Amato, in press), communication image (Infante, 1981, 1985a), leadership perception (Schultz, 1982), superior-subordinate satisfaction (Infante & Gorden, 1985b) and other organizational communication outcomes (Infante & Gorden, 1985a). Efforts at understanding the relationship between sex, sex-role orientation and argumentativeness has also been conducted (Infante, 1985a, 1985b; Rancer & Dierks-Stewart, 1985; Rancer & Baukus, 1984). Although this accumulated body of knowledge is impressive, additional research is necessary in order to more fully understand how argumentativeness influences interpersonal communication.

Some Recent Findings on Argumentativeness

Research on the influence of argumentativeness has taken several directions. To date, six research directions appear to have emerged:

1. Research investigating factors associated with individuals who differ or vary in the motivational tendency of argumentativeness.

2. Research examining the influence of sex , gender and argumentativeness.

3. Research on argumentativeness in the marital context.

4. Research on the influence of argumentativeness in negotiations, leadership and decision-making.

5. Research exploring the interaction of the trait and the situational components of the argumentativeness model.

6. Research on argumentativeness in the organizational context.

As another presentation on this program will address argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in the organizational context, this brief review will concern itself with the first five research directions.

1. Factors Associated With Individuals Who Vary in ARGgt

Infante (1981) examined the communication behavior of high and low argumentatives when they argued with moderates. High argumentatives were seen as more: inflexible, interested, verbose, dynamic, expert, willing, and displayed more argumentative skill than low argumentatives. In addition, high

argumentatives intended to exert greater effort to win an argument. This study is significant because it represents an examination of observable behaviors of high and low argumentative individuals.

Working under the assumption that argumentativeness is a construct relevant to communication education, Infante (1982) investigated characteristics of the argumentative student in the communication classroom. He developed a profile of the high argumentative student as an individual who: received more high school training in argumentation, reported a higher college grade point average, was born earlier in the family birth order, preferred smaller classes, and was more liberal.

Rancer and Infante (1983) investigated the influence of physical attractiveness and the similarity of an adversary in ARG$_{gt}$ on responses to an argumentative situation. They discovered that the physical attractiveness variable did not influence responses to the argumentative situation, but that the similarity variable did. Additional work with this similarity effect (Rancer & Infante, 1985) found that, in general, high argumentatives are more motivated to argue than lows, and that high argumentatives are motivated most when their adversary is also a high argumentative. Apparently having an argumentative adversary stimulates the high argumentative's already high excitation component.

Infante, Trebing, Shepherd and Seeds (1984) investigated whether individuals who differ in ARG$_{gt}$ differ in using verbal aggression. Results indicated that high argumentatives were least provoked to verbal aggression. This finding stimulated the

Skill Deficiency Explanation of verbal aggressiveness. Infante, Wall, Leap and Danielson (1984) also discovered that when a person to be influenced is a high or moderate argumentative, males are more likely to prefer verbally aggressive message strategies than when the influence targt is a low argumentative.

Finally, Rancer, Baukus and Infante (1985) examined relations between beliefs about arguing and motivation to argue. First, a set of seven beliefs about arguing were uncovered: hostility, activity/process, control/dominance, conflict/dissonance, self-image, learning and skill. Then, it was determined that high and low argumentatives differed on those belief structures. More high argumentatives had positive beliefs about arguing as activity, control/dominance, conflict/dissonance, learning, self-image and skill. Low argumentatives were highest in the negative beliefs about hostility, control/dominance and conflict/dissonance. High argumentatives believe arguing to be primarily a learning experience. Low argumentatives primarily believe that arguing is a hostile communication act which increases, rather than reduces, tension between individuals.

2. Sex, Gender and Argumentativeness

Early in the development of the construct, Infante (1982) observed sex differences in trait argumentativeness. Males were found to be significantly higher in ARG than females. gt
Recently, additional research has been conducted in order to explain the influence of sex and gender in argumentativeness. Rancer and Dierks-Stewart (1985) examined the influence of sex-

role orientation on trait argumentativeness. They found that individuals classified as instrumental (masculine), regardless of biological sex, were significantly higher in trait argumentativeness than expressive (feminine), androgynous, and undifferentiated individuals.

Rancer and Baukus (1984) investigated how males and females discriminate on beliefs about arguing. Results suggested that sex alone was not a powerful discriminator of beliefs about arguing. The inclusion of the variable of trait argumentativeness along with sex enhanced the discrimination of the groups.

Infante (1985b) examined whether preferences for verbal aggression and argument would interact with an individual's sex, the sex of a highly argumentative adversary, and the adversary's use of verbal aggression. In general, individuals indicated a preference for argumentative versus verbally aggressive messages. However, when a highly argumentative adversary used verbal aggression, females were more likely to use an argumentative strategy, while males were more likely to prefer verbally aggressive strategies.

Since arguing is considered functional, and argumentativeness has been conceptualized as a desirable communication trait, the consequences of being too low in argumentativeness may be dysfunctional. Individuals extremely low in motivation to argue may lack social and professional influence. Consequently, they may have difficulty promoting ideas, positions and issues they consider important to

themselves. As such, they may yield more frequently to others' wishes and desires, they may be quite compliant and lack persuasive impact.

If females are, in general, lower in motivation to argue (Infante, 1982; Schultz & Anderson, 1982) then they may be especially susceptible to influence attempts of others. Thus, females may be sacrificing some "control" of self and environment and reducing chances for social influence and power.

Efforts to develop methods of enhancing an individual's motivation to argue and argumentative skill are currently underway (Infante, 1985a; Schultz & Anderson, 1982). One approach to influencing women to be more argumentative is the "cued argument procedure" (Infante, 1985a). In this procedure, individuals are provided with several relevant arguments to be used in an upcoming argument and are instructed in how to use them. In one seminal study, Infante (1985a) found that low argumentative women who were cued with relevant lines of argument were perceived more favorably on the expertise and dynamism dimensions of source credibility than low argumentative women who were not cued.

3. Arguing and Argumentativeness in the Marital Context

Of particular interest to many interpersonal communication researchers is how married couples deal with conflict and controversy (Yelsma, 1984; Sillars, Pike, Jones & Redmon,, 1983; Gottman, 1979).

Gottman (1979) has demonstrated that methods of arguing influence marital satisfaction. Recent research has incorporated

the constructs of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness into the study of marital communication and interaction. Rancer, Baukus and Amato (in press) investigated whether married couples similar and dissimilar in argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness differed in marital satisfaction. Results indicated that couples dissimilar in argumentativeness reported more overall marital satisfaction. Rancer, Baukus and Amato explained this finding by suggesting that a "traditionalism" factor emerged in the study. In their study, most of the couples classified as dissimilar had the husband higher than the wife in argumentativeness. These dissimilar couples may have held more traditional beliefs and adhered to "traditional" sex roles about the "proper" communication behavior of husbands and wives. Additional research in this area is currently being designed to further examine the influence of aggressive communication in the marital context.

4. Argumentativeness in Negotiations, Leadership and Decision-Making

This emerging body of research has studied the trait predispositon's influence in leadership, decision-making and negotiations. Schultz (1980) found that highly argumentative individuals were more likely to be rated as group leaders. Schultz and Anderson (1982) have been developing a three-step model of argument for training low argumentative individuals (mostly female) to become more competent and effective negotiators. This line of research, along with Infante's (1985a) "cued argument procedure" holds great promise for enhancing the negotiating and bargaining

ability of low argumentative individuals.

Schultz (1982) found that highly argumentative individuals were also rated as more influential on a group's decision, and exerted greater influence on a group's ultimate decision. This line of research awaits additional empirical examination.

5. Interaction of Trait and Situational Components of the Argumentativeness Model

Research on the interaction of the trait and situational components of the argumentativeness model is beginning to emerge. Infante (in press a) has found that including situational perceptions along with the trait component of the argumentativeness model significantly enhanced the prediction of an individual's motivation to argue in a particular situation. This interactionist perspective (Andersen, 1984; Infante, in press a) suggests that behavior is not totally predicted by either trait or situational factors alone, but is a product of both.

While admittedly few studies have been conducted in the communication discipline employing this interactionist perspective, the argumentativeness model, complete with trait and situational components, is especially well-suited for this line of research.

Suggested Research Directions on Argumentativeness in Interpersonal Communication Contexts

This emerging body of research on argumentativeness and aggressive communication has begun to provide us with an understanding of the argumentative individual, and how the trait predisposition manifests itself in interpersonal and organizational communication contexts. While many insights have been gained about this motivational tendency, and programs are being developed to enhance an individual's argumentative general tendency and skill, additional insight regarding argumentative communication awaits empirical examination.

While no means exhaustive, the following questions and areas of study remain to be addressed about argumentativeness in interpersonal communication.

Additional research needs to explore how beliefs about arguing, and the underlying motivational tendencies develop. Can additional factors be identified that influence one individual to be extremely high in ARG , another extremely low? Infante (1982) discovered that high school training, birth order, political orientation and biological sex may influence the underlying motivational tendency to be argumentative. Can other factors be identified which stimulate the development of an individual's trait predisposition? Research on communication apprehension has identified some "causes" which may stimulate an individual to avoid communicative situations. Perhaps our understanding of aggressive communication in general, and argumentativeness in particular, may be enhanced by this line of

research.

One interesting question that emerges from this broad area of research is how influential is parents behavior on a child's predisposition to argue? Do children engage in behavior modelling of parents in the development of the trait predisposition? If so, is there a relationship between parent(s) and child regarding the general tendency to be argumentative?

A great deal of research on argumentativeness has focused on the individual low in the trait. This line of research needs to be continued. We must investigate further the "skill deficiency" explanation of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Additional research must be conducted searching for other explanations of why some individuals have extremely low motivation to argue.

At the other extreme, additional research should investigate more fully the highly argumentative individual. One area which would benefit from additional research on the high argumentative is in the area of relational development. How does extremely high motivation to argue effect the individual's development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships? How does the trait influence satisfaction with interpersonal relationships?

Seminal research by Infante (1982) suggested that high argumentatives did not differ significantly from low or moderate argumentatives in satisfaction with interpersonal relationships, or ability to relate to peers. Infante based this finding on high argumentatives self-perceptions of relational satisfaction. An appropriate follow-up study could examine how close and/or

significant others (of the high argumentative) view their communication and relational satisfaction with that individual.

Can an individual's motivation to argue become so great as to impair their development of interpersonal or intimate relationships? At what point, if at all, does being extremely high in argumentativeness become counterproductive to friendship development, dating behavior and marital interaction?

Another line of research worthy of pursuit involves an examination of the individual moderate in argumentativeness. It has been suggested (Rancer & Infante, 1983) that individuals who score within the middle range (moderates) of argumentativeness may be most affected by situational factors. The moderate argumentative's approach and avoidance tendencies may be especially sensitive to situational factors. Situational factors such as the topic of an argument, ego-involvement with the topic, power, dominance, knowledge, and status differences between adversaries needs to be investigated as additional variance in motivation to argue may be explained by these factors.

Research on nonverbal behavior and aggressive communication awaits examination. Do nonverbal behaviors of high, moderate and low argumentatives differ as they engage in disputatious communication? Are there any consistent nonverbal behaviors among each of these three groups? Since the nonverbal channels convey so much of the information in a communication message, these questions appear worthy of study.

Cross-cultural interaction is currently receiving a great deal of attention in interpersonal communication. Are there cultural differences in argumentativeness? How does one's

culture influence the development of the argumentativeness trait? Does being a member of a certain culture and/or ethnic group promote a higher or lower general tendency to argue?

Finally, an extremely pragmatic, yet difficult issue is how we as a discipline can favorably influence the public's perceptions and beliefs about the value of arguing and argumentative communication. How can we effectively educate/inform the public about the difference between arguing and verbal aggressiveness, between arguing and "fighting?"

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